**Please cite as:** EUAA, '3.10. Humanitarian workers' in *Country Guidance: Afghanistan*, May 2024.

# 3.10. Humanitarian workers

COMMON ANALYSIS
Last update: May 2024

This profile includes individuals working for national and international NGOs.

## COI summary

Before the takeover, there were cases of NGO workers being targeted by actors in the conflict as a result of their activities being perceived as non-neutral or in violation of cultural or religious norms. Examples included targeting of people active in polio vaccination campaigns (sometimes considered as spies) or in de-mining programs (considered as an activity contrary to the military interests of the Taliban). ISKP also considered humanitarian workers as legitimate targets because of links with foreign organisations or donors [Security September 2021, 1.4.2., pp. 31-32; 2.23., pp. 101-102, COI query on humanitarian workers and healthcare professionals, pp. 1-16].

After the takeover, although the *de facto* authorities repeatedly stated their guarantees for the 'safety and security of humanitarian staff' and freedom of movement of humanitarian workers, including women, the overall environment in which they perform their activities was reported as 'extremely challenging' and precarious, with *de facto* local authorities routinely interfering and restricting their operations. Since the Taliban takeover, the number of arrests of humanitarian workers has increased, as the UN observed, from 3 cases in 2020 to 76 cases in 2022. In February 2022, there were reports of attacks against healthcare workers engaged in the polio vaccination programme by unknown gunmen, including the killing of 8 health workers. Between 6 February and 20 May 2023, the UN recorded a total number of 299 incidents involving interference in the implementation of humanitarian activities, which represents a significant increase compared to the same period in 2022, when 158 incidents were recorded. However, during the same period, 78 attacks against humanitarian personnel, assets and facilities were recorded, which represent a slight decrease from 91 incidents documented in the respective period of 2022 [Country Focus 2023, 4.8., p. 93; Targeting 2022, 9.1.2., p. 176].

According to one source, the Taliban GDI and MPVPV actively work to identify perceived opponents, including by posing obstacles to NGOs with staff that they suspect and/or with programmes contrary to the Taliban ideology. For example, in September 2023, 18 staff members of the NGO International Assistance Mission (IAM) in Afghanistan located in Ghor Province were arrested and detained under unclear circumstances [Country Focus 2023, 4.8.,

pp. 93-94].

On 24 December 2022, the Taliban banned women from working for national and international NGOs. However, after major organisations suspended their operations, the Taliban on some occasions gave assurances on provincial or local level so that female staff would be able to carry out their duties. On 5 April 2023, the *de facto* authorities issued a countrywide ban on Afghan women working in the UN. Although not officially stated by the *de facto* authorities, many NGOs reported that exemptions of such bans were made for women working in the health, nutrition and educational sectors, however this was not reported countrywide [Country Focus 2023, 3.1., p. 46; 4.4.5., p. 78; 4.4.6., p. 79].

There were no recorded incidents in which humanitarian workers were targeted by ISKP or unidentified armed group(s) within the reference period July 2022 – September 2023 [Country Focus 2023, 4.8., pp. 93-94].

## Conclusions and guidance

**Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?**

Acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g., killing, arbitrary detention).

**What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?**

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: gender (i.e. women), nature of activities (e.g. activities for national/international NGO related to polio vaccination, demining, or other activities being perceived as non-neutral or in violation of cultural or religious norms), link with the former government or foreign donors, speaking out or acting against the Taliban or another armed group, origin from areas where ISKP have operational capacity, etc.

**Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?**

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile is highly likely to be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion and/or religion.

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